



H.R. 2003 – Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007

FLOOR SITUATION

H.R. 2003 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Rep. Donald Payne (D-NJ) on April 23, 2007. The House Committee on Foreign Affairs approved the bill as amended on September 26, 2007.

H.R. 2003 is expected to be considered on the floor on October 2, 2007.

SUMMARY

Authorization of Appropriations: The bill authorizes \$20 million for each fiscal year 2008 and 2009.

Support for Human Rights: H.R. 2003 requires the State Department to provide financial support to local and national human rights groups as well as legal support for political prisoners and prisoners of conscious. It also establishes programs to improve judicial monitoring and to strengthen independent media. The bill also expands the Voice of America's Ethiopia program.

Support for Democratization: The bill provides assistance to strengthen government at all levels in Ethiopia. It establishes programs to foster reconciliation efforts between the Ethiopian Government and political parties and to provide election monitoring training for civil society groups. The bill prohibits "nonessential" U.S. assistance under this section for the Ethiopian Government if it obstructs U.S. efforts to promote human rights, democracy, economic freedom, and freedom of the press and judiciary.

Limitation on Security Assistance: H.R. 2003 limits security assistance, with a few exceptions, unless the President certifies that a list of items have occurred, including 1) all political prisoners have been released and their property returned; 2) the Ethiopian judiciary is functioning independently; 3) the media in Ethiopia is able to operate freely; 4) internet access is not restricted; and 5) human rights organizations are able to work in an environment free of harassment, intimidation, and persecution.

Note: The President can waive this provision.

Travel Restrictions: H.R. 2003 denies visas to 1) any member of the Ethiopian Government who has been involved in using lethal force against peaceful demonstrators or police officers in Ethiopia or who has been credibly implicated in gross human rights abuses; 2) Ethiopian Government security personnel who were involved in the June or November 2005 shootings of

demonstrators; and 3) security personnel responsible for the murder of Etenesh Yemam or murdering prisoners at Kaliti prison during the election violence in 2005.

Note: The President can waive this provision.

Support for Economic Development: The bill requires the President to provide assistance for the economic development of Ethiopia's Nile and Awash River resources. It also requires healthcare assistance to support hospitals, clinics, and healthcare centers in Ethiopia.

Report: The bill requires the President to submit within 180 days a report detailing a comprehensive plan to address security, human rights, democratization, and economic freedom issues in Ethiopia.

BACKGROUND

With more than 77 million inhabitants, Ethiopia is Africa's oldest independent nation. While Ethiopia is an important strategic partner with the U.S. in the Global War on Terror, human rights abuses remain a concern.

Following the 2005 presidential elections, 193 political dissidents were killed and many more arrested while protesting the outcome of the elections. Earlier this year many of the imprisoned political dissidents were released. Ethiopia, however, continues to suppress independent media and to harass and intimidate political opposition.

In late 2006, upon the request of the Transitional Federal Government in Somalia, the Ethiopian military invaded Somalia to unseat the extremist-controlled Council of Islamic Courts. The U.S. supported the Ethiopian military actions because of the Council of Islamic Courts' ties to Islamic terrorism.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006, a number of human rights abuses, were reported in Ethiopia, including: limitations on citizens' rights "to change their government during the most recent elections; unlawful killings, and beating, abuse, and mistreatment of detainees and opposition supporters by security forces...arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly those suspected of sympathizing with or being members of the opposition; detention of thousands without charge and lengthy pretrial detention...restrictions on freedom of the press; arrest, detention, and harassment of journalists for publishing articles critical of the government...trafficking in persons..." ([Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2006](#)).

COST

The Congressional Budget Office has not scored the bill.

STAFF CONTACT

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